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Sermon on the Epistle for Septuagesima Sunday.

1 COR. 9, 24—10, 5.

There is a melancholy tone in the words of the Savior's last prayer, when, speaking of Judas the traitor, He says: "Those that Thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled." These words found a sad echo in the speech of Peter at the election of Matthias. "Men and brethren," the apostle said, "this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was a guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as the field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric let another take." Extremely sad is also the remark of St. Paul at the close of his second Epistle to Timothy: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed to Thessalonica."

Alongside of these cases of individual backsliding from grace, we might place instances of entire congregations relapsing into their former state of unbelief; *e. g.*, that of the Galatians, of whom Paul writes: "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that you should not obey the truth?"—and that of the church at Ephesus, of which John writes: "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

These instances bring to our recollection the earnest warnings of the Savior and of His apostles to the believers to be faithful unto the end. Time-belief, Christianity by fits and starts, good weather devotion, and all the kindred forms of incomplete discipleship, have cost the Church millions of souls. Now, lest there should be some among us who would set their faces toward the world from which they have been reclaimed by the Savior's love, and for a general warning to us all, permit me, from the lesson before us, to speak to you upon this theme:

CHRISTIANITY REQUIRES CONSTANT EFFORT.

This is shown,

1. *By a comparison of Christianity with the national games of the Greeks;*
2. *By the fate of the Israelites in the desert.*

1.

The apostle begins: "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we, an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." These words of the apostle are intended, in the first place, to justify to the Corinthians his unremitting efforts in behalf of the Gospel. He had stated that for the Gospel's sake he had been "made all things to all men, that he might by all means save some." He had exclaimed: "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel." His own unrelenting zeal in the ministry, however, the apostle intended also as a practical illustration, that Christianity in general requires constant effort. This truth he now sets forth in a striking manner by referring to the national games of the ancient Greeks, some of which were held every fifth year on the Isthmus of Corinth, and which consisted in racing, wrestling, boxing, throwing, and other athletic sports. As these games were held in the close neighborhood of Corinth, the Corinthians were well acquainted with them; perhaps some of the male members of the congregation had themselves engaged in them, so that the apostle called up familiar scenes to them when he wrote them: "Know ye not," etc.

The contestants in these games had to submit to a severe course of physical training before entering the contest. They had to observe the strictest diet, denying themselves all delicacies; they had to undergo heat and cold, and spend a number of hours every day in the most fatiguing practice. Then, when they entered the lists,

every muscle had to be strained to the contest; every advantage must be quickly perceived and grasped, and every weakness on their own part most carefully concealed. They might slip in the race when almost in sight of the goal; they might get their arm broken, their foot sprained, their eye knocked out; they might be dealt blows that would daze them; they might be made to swallow mouthfuls of dust; and might, after all, be conquered. And, even in case they came out victorious, their reward was but a green wreath that would wither in a day or two.

Now, the apostle's argument, in a nutshell, is this: If for so scanty a reward and in so uncertain a contest, where only one can possibly be a winner, men will undergo such hardships, why should not Christians far more zealously compete for the immortal crown of eternal life, which is the sure reward of *all* contestants? And really, can the Judge and Awarder of the prize in this contest be satisfied with anything less than the very best efforts of the contestants? Certainly not. Then let Christians learn a lesson of self-denial, determination, watchfulness, judiciousness, zeal, and perseverance from the children of this world; for it is upon these virtues that their victory, too, depends.

Temperateness in all things, and subjugation of the body, is what the apostle explicitly advises; that means the same thing as what a few Sundays ago he called sacrificing our bodies; only here the relation of such a sacrifice to our continuance and progress in Christianity is pointed out. The indulgence of any passion will at once tell fatally upon the spiritual strength of a Christian. In proportion as you gratify your desire for strong drink you will lose will-power to resist the craving; in proportion as you feed the libertine in your heart by reading books and papers that you should not, and associate with companions from which you should flee with the fleet foot of a Joseph, you will whet the appetite of the lewd spirit in you; give the reins to your anger once, and you will find it double work to conquer the swelling passion the next time; let the love of money gain that much power over you that you refuse a just expenditure for no other reason than because you wince under the thought of parting with the glittering coin, and you have welded the first link in the golden chain that shall shackle you in the misery of miserliness. All these things will in a very short time tell on your Christianity. And you cannot, — especially in a small congregation, where everybody cannot help but observe everybody else, — you cannot for any length of time conceal your falling behind or your standstill in Christianity; your works, your associations, your views, etc., will soon show whether you are in this race or not.

The apostle furthermore exhorts us to "run," and that "not as uncertainly." It is as if he had said: "Christians, do not think that

the church is the place to take your ease; it is that as little as the race course. Those who take their ease are outside of the ropes." If a Christian remains at a standstill, or goes backward, he is plainly no longer in the race, but lies in the track, revealing his own downfall and causing others to stumble. Whatever it be that has caused him to halt,—whether it be his surfeited flesh, or his love of the world, which he is loath to leave behind altogether, and which will not join him in the race, or the temptations of the devil, who has succeeded in diverting his eyes from his Father's business and his own best interests,—he needs speedy rousing, for any moment the trumpet may sound announcing the end of the race. And when he runs, the apostle desires him to run with a well-conceived aim and a purpose to which he is riveted by faith. It is not the aimless activity of the butterfly; it is not the showy, ostentatious busyness without any real business, but the well-calculated, steady, and noiseless work of the bee, that the apostle wants. Christians have no fads which they follow for a season, and then throw aside. This short span of life is far too precious to engage in experimenting, as so many do.

And the apostle also urges us: "Fight, but not as one that beateth the air." A skillful pugilist will not strike one blow more than is necessary; he will take judicious aim, collect sufficient strength, and seize the best opportunity, and when he strikes, he strikes home. This means that Christians should not waste their spiritual strength in the warfare against the flesh, the world, and the devil in and about them by a sham-battle of virtuous indignations and sentimental resolutions to reform. The struggle here intended is no amusement, nor is it child's play; the person who is not in mortal earnest in this strife had better quit at once. *E. g.*, the devil laughs in his sleeve when he hears that wholesale confession: "Oh yes, I know that I am a sinner; all men are!" But say in your own solitary hearing and with an honest blush mantling your cheek: "It is a disgrace that I made the excuse I did for neglecting my Christian duty!" and convince yourself that you have many times acted in exactly the same manner, but have found it quite convenient to fabricate ready excuses, and note what a different effect such blows at the old Adam will have.

Christianity requires constant effort, or else it perishes; yea, worse than that, it becomes a public reproach. How many Christians act like Cain, defying the Lord to tell them that they are to be their brothers' keepers! They live with no intention of leaving a mark behind them. And true, as to a good mark, they leave none, but evil impressions are made by them, that will startle them at the day when all things shall be made known. Paul is deeply concerned about this that, lest, "when he had preached to others, he himself

should become a castaway." Now, as to the apostle, this fear which he here expresses was not verified; for when awaiting his execution at Rome, he could truthfully write: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." But we think of others who began in the spirit, and ended in the flesh. We think, in particular, of the whole nation of the Jews whom the Savior so often warned, holding out to them the humiliating fact that the heathen would come from the East and the West, and would sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of glory, while they should be cast out.

2.

The fate of the Jews the apostle recalls in this connection, saying: "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness." The study of the conduct of the ancient covenant people of God brings into prominent view the fact that the grace of God can be bestowed in vain. Israel was certainly a preferred stock among the nations of the earth. Moses could justly boast to his people: "Surely, this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord, our God, is in all things that we call upon Him for? And what nation is there so great that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this Law which I set before you this day?" Among this people God had, so to speak, His earthly home; His fire and furnace were at Jerusalem; their priests and prophets were His inspired spokesmen; the wisdom of their Law became the talk of the world; and their entire history was a brilliant chain of miraculous manifestations of the grace and power of God. Lastly, the Son of God Himself made the land of the Jews the scene of His wonderful labors. What the Savior said regarding Capernaum, namely, that by His presence and work in that place the city had been exalted unto heaven, can be fitly applied to the whole country and people. Verily, the Jews at one time were what Peter calls the Christians, "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people."

And yet, in no other instance within the range of recorded history has there been revealed such a degree of malicious resistance to the grace of God, such an utter repudiation of better knowledge,

such conscious falling away from grace, as in the case of the Jews. The song of Miriam and the maidens of Israel on the overthrow of Pharaoh's host in the Red Sea, the thunders of Sinai had scarcely died away in the camp in the wilderness, when the people bent the knee before the golden calf. The cloud that hovered over them during the day, protecting them with its cooling and refreshing moisture against the scorching heat of the desert, and that lit up the darkness of the night for them, seemed to speak in vain of the presence of the great and mighty God in the camp; the abundant water that gushed forth out of the rock at the touch of Moses' wand, not only restoring the famished thousands to life and inspiring them with new courage, but also prefiguring the saving mercies of the Redeemer, the Rock of Salvation,—that water became to the very leader of Israel the occasion of stumbling.

All this goes to show the futility of the claim so often advanced by the Jews in the days of our Lord, namely, that they were Abraham's children and could claim heaven as their natural birthright. It also discountenances the doctrine since then advanced in the Church of Christ, that the elect can never fall from grace, that once in grace means always in grace. This doctrine which has led thousands astray into the most criminal security cannot stand one minute before a text of Scripture such as this Epistle-lesson. We should rather look at divine grace as upon a divine investment in us, carrying with it immense responsibilities of which it requires the receiver to acquit himself by constant efforts. Grace is, indeed, primarily and chiefly, the great sin-remover; but it is also the great sanctifier of lives; it operates in this double capacity in all who are made to receive it. He, whom the privileges which he enjoys under the Gospel inspire with a hope that he can sin with impunity, has not yet learned even the rudiments of Christian knowledge, and is, moreover, acting most absurdly even from the standpoint of reason. For what person in sound mind would continually stab himself, because he has a physician that will dress his wound? Or who but a fool would go back into a pest-house, because he has been cured once and would try the cure the second time?

But if any should doubt whether we have made the correct application of the allusion of St. Paul to the people of Israel, let him hear how Paul himself applies these words. He says: "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these

things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Plainly here the apostle tells us that Christian faith requires constant effort.

And how gladly should we put forth these efforts; for we work by the grace of God, which conquers the obstacles in our way. We work, but we work *by the power of God*, which is mighty to overcome any temptation. We have been made sure of our prize before we entered upon this race; the end is well with our faith. Towards that end our faith strives, and we must run with it. Let us therefore pluck up courage through faith and run by the strength of Christ. Amen.

Sermon on the Gospel for Sexagesima.

LUKE 8, 4—15.

The Gospel of Christ has been given to man for the purpose of saving him. God out of unfathomable love sent His Son to this earth, and had Him suffer and die an ignominious death, thereby making satisfaction for the sins of man; and this atonement is held out to man in the Gospel. The object of the Gospel is to save man. Hence you will find nothing displeasing about it, it is good, pleasant, sweet, and altogether lovely. The very nature of it shows this. Isaiah, speaking of this Gospel, says: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me," etc., Is. 61, 1. 2. The Gospel is good tidings to the meek, ointment to the broken-hearted, liberty to the captives, release to the bound, comfort to the mourning, rest to the heavy-laden, bread for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, hope for the despairing, and life to the dying.

Since the Gospel teems with such sweetness and goodness, what may be the reason why so many live and die without it? Many *will not* hear it. Without knowing its nature, they condemn it as something useless, yea, injurious to their earthly happiness. And of those that do hear it many do not understand it, they close their eyes, so that they do not see the light which shows them the way to heaven. Why is this? The parable of our text discloses the reason. Let us, then, address ourselves to the serious consideration of this parable and the explanation given to it by our Savior.

1.

At a great gathering of people Jesus spoke to them by a parable, saying: "A sower went out," etc., v. 5. The seed is the same in all four cases. This seed is the Word of God, which is sown by His servants. This Word does not change when applied to individuals,

its efficacy and power is intrinsic. This Word is scattered abroad by the ministers of Christ, as the sower in spring goes forth to sow his seed. Now, some of the seed, Christ says, "*fell by the wayside.*" There was a footpath or road leading across the field, and some of the seed fell upon it; people traveling along the way stepped on it and ruined it, or the birds came and ate it up.

Turning to the explanation, we find: "*Those by the wayside,*" etc., v. 12. We have here the cause why some hear the Word in vain to their own condemnation. This class is inattentive. They attend public worship out of custom; they go to church because it is a habit with them. During the services their minds are engaged with other things, which they consider of greater importance than the matters pertaining to their soul. Strange thoughts, vain thoughts, yea, sinful thoughts occupy their minds, carry them away from the real object of devotion. Mental stagnation sets in, while things eternal pass them by without affecting them in the least. Poor mortals that are so careless and negligent as not to hear what is said and inculcated. God speaks to them, and they heed it not; God calls them, and they hear it not; God pleads with them, and they perceive it not — *seed by the wayside!*

Another class hears the Word, but understands it not. The Word of God is brought before their minds, is heard, but not understood. The spiritual sense of God's Law and Gospel is unknown to them, or as it is expressed, "Seeing, they see not; hearing, they understand not." There is a vast difference between hearing bells ring and hearing God's Word as we should. Both are caught up by the organs of hearing; one leaves you unmoved, while the other should affect your heart; one rings in your ear, the other should ring in your soul. The Word, since the Spirit of God dwells in it, should not be a cold, indifferent, meaningless, worthless thing unto us, which deserves not to be thought over and pondered, but full of understanding and meaning, on which we stake our greatest interests. If it is not, then it is to us seed by the wayside!

Observe what Jesus says: "*Those by the wayside,*" etc., v. 12. Satan accomplishes this in various ways. Often he will cause men to forget the Word of God as soon as it is spoken. If you ask such persons about a sermon they have heard, they are unable to tell anything about it; the whole discourse is unto them like a dream that vanishes upon awakening. Satan steals away the Word from them. Another device of the devil is the sinner's resistance to the Word. *E. g.*, man is told by God that he is a sinner, a subject of the Almighty's wrath. Satan tells man: "That is not true; see what good you have done on this earth! Is God just in condemning you for this?" Such and the like vain thoughts hinder the Lord's kingdom in reaching our hearts. *Seed is thus sown by the wayside*, where it does not fulfill its object, *i. e.*, of working faith and salvation.

2.

"And some fell *upon a rock*," etc., v. 6. There was but a thin covering of good ground, perhaps an inch, and below this hard rock, so that no root could penetrate to obtain moisture and strength. As soon as the sun was up, those tender plants were scorched by his rays. This is a very common observation, made by the farmer and every one that looks over a field of grain. Christ Himself tells us what He means with this illustration, when He says: "*They on the rock*," etc., v. 13. It is an extremely sad and melancholy fact that is here laid bare to our view.

A person hears or reads the Word of God, is convinced of his sinfulness and of his need of a Savior, heartily longs for Him, gladly embraces Him, and rejoices over the mercy of God shown to him; he is happy, he has true faith in Christ, he is at peace with his God, he has laid hold on eternal life, and would inherit it if he would continue in this state; but alas, "he has no root!" Steadfastness, perseverance is lacking him; as soon as affliction or persecution arises for the Word's sake, immediately he is offended; when called upon to suffer anything for the Word's sake, he falls away. Oh, how true, how true this is! We need not go back to the hoary times of the apostles, when the bodies of martyrs smoked upon the pyres of persecution, when Christ's true followers sealed their confessions with their own blood—it is not necessary to search in the ages gone by for those whom Christ means; just glance about you, walk up and down the ranks of professing Christians, and you will find them dropping out by scores, being offended at the eternal Word of God! Ah, the ranks are daily growing thinner and thinner on this account.

Here is a man who has received the Word, believes it, and, by virtue of God's irrevocable promise, would be saved, had he remained steadfast in the hour of affliction. He has a beautiful child, a promising boy. Down comes some lurking disease and slays the lad. The father is smitten with grief, his heart is bleeding; he thought so much of that child, now a lifeless corpse. Ah,—surprising thought,—why has God afflicted me thus? I would not have cared had I lost several thousand dollars, had my house burned down, or had some other affliction befallen me; but why, why did God do this? And Satan draws nigh to him and whispers into his ear: "God is not merciful; had He been, He would not have taken your darling away!" The man says: "Yes, that's it, that's it, He can't have mercy!" There is offense at the Word, the man denies a great assertion, the universal truth of Scripture, that God is merciful: he has fallen away. Alas, poor man!

Another Christian is afflicted with disease, he is deprived of much earthly happiness. While others enjoy themselves, he cannot. Years elapse before health returns; he is unaccustomed to the sickroom, and now he is compelled to be in it. While he is fretting, Satan is

waiting for an opportunity. The opportune time comes. Is that justice if God afflicts me, His child by faith, and lets yonder scoffer and wicked person live in happiness? That cannot be right! The man begins to cavil, to doubt, to disbelieve; this runs on until he believes nothing—offended at God!

Or a person begins business or some important work that he would gladly see succeed; it is his earnest desire to make a success of it. But all is in vain, it will not work. His unbelieving neighbor tries the same thing with the same means, and he gets along splendidly, the outlook is propitious; success follows in his wake, all is very promising. The Christian fails, the unbeliever succeeds; how is it possible? Should it not be the reverse? These and the like questions prey upon such a person's mind, and the conclusion he arrives at is, God does me wrong. He stumbles, he is offended!

In instances like these, remember, Who has made thee judge over God? Whence have you a right to find fault with Divine Providence? You have none, my friend. Are you wiser than the all-wise God? Are you above the majestic, holy, and immortal Creator? O fool that attempts this! That is Satan's work, the work of darkness, the work of hell and night!

Why be offended at these things? Look at what the Bible tells us: Acts 14, 22; Hebr. 12, 6; Ps. 73, 14. What is chastisement, trouble, and affliction to a child of God if he knows they are sent from heaven! Opposition will come, and the believer will suffer therefrom; but what is that? What are a few years of suffering towards the glory that shall follow? Know you not that all believers had enemies? Abel, the second man born on earth, had an enemy in his elder brother Cain, and so fierce was Cain's malignity that he slew him. Noah suffered the scorn and contempt of his age. In all likelihood thousands went out to laugh at the huge "box" Noah was building, and to tell him what a fool he was, much like some people to-day who go to church to hear, and laugh over, and sneer at, the Word of God. Abraham in a strange country, amidst the heathen, was an object of contempt with them. David had his enemies. Peter had to die by violence. Paul, poor yet great Paul, how did he suffer! Beset on all sides, persecuted from one city to another, chased like a guileless deer, from Jerusalem to Rome, where the hissing click of the ax ended his troubles. And lo, look at Christ, our adorable Savior, what enemies He had! The learned and great men of the age scorned, railed at, hated, persecuted Him; Herod and Pilate joined hands, Jew and Gentile became friends, to slay Him. And should not we, for whom Jesus suffered such great things, readily and willingly bear the affliction, the persecution, the hatred in its various shades and degrees which is borne against us, for Jesus' sake?

Yea, a follower of Jesus Christ will have enemies, they always have had them, and they shall continue to have them until the end

of time. Here is God's word for it: James 4, 4. Hence, be not offended at the tribulations, the sufferings in this life,—we have well deserved them by our sins,—lest the Word of God be to us *seed sown upon a rock*, where it cannot abide and bear fruit.

3.

Again, some *seed fell among thorns*, etc., v. 7. This is a common thing in fields and gardens. You sow seed, it springs up, has a good appearance, but before it bears fruit, thorns, weeds, tares, and the like spring up beside it, grow much faster than it does, overreach it, and choke it, so that it cannot bring forth fruit; it is generally a long, pale, thin, and sickly-looking stalk without an ear or a grain. The explanation tells us: "*That which fell among thorns*," etc., v. 14.

We have here another class of unfortunate hearers; they are the worldly-minded. Anxious cares for the things pertaining to this life are here compared to thorns, and the comparison is very pertinent. They are as thorns, long and sharp, pricking and stinging the hearts of many. These corroding cares, having once fairly gotten a hold on man, pester and worry him to the grave; they shut out, hinder, the Word of God. Immoderate cares are extremely hurtful to man's spiritual life. How can it be otherwise? God tells us, they are against His Word, that He hates them. Do you, then, please God if your heart is filled with them? That is not glorifying God if my heart is engulfed with the cares of this world; but if I subdue them, cast them away, then I please Him.

The second thorn mentioned is the deceitfulness of riches. Riches are called deceitful, because they deceive their possessor as well as the spectator with a false appearance of happiness. The dream of this world is, that the wealthy man is the truly happy man on earth; but this is a fatal mistake. If this principle were true, then, indeed, the wealthy would be happy, and the poor, miserable. But examine the state of things. There is just as much misery, gross and secret vice and sin, that cries to God for vengeance, among the wealthy as among the poor; yea, perhaps even more, for the man of means is able to indulge in certain kinds of evil things which the poor cannot. Now, if riches betray, if there is no happiness in them, real happiness must be elsewhere, and is greatly impeded by riches, which move man to put off the vast concerns of the soul. They cause carelessness in the things of the soul, they create indifference towards God's Word, they generate pride and haughtiness, and make it a hard task for a person to enter into the kingdom of God, so hard, that Christ says: Matt. 19, 24. Paul writes to Timothy: 1 Tim. 6, 6—11.

The third thorn mentioned are "the pleasures of life." They ruin many; they render the faith of many ineffectual and unfruitful. A life wholly or in part given to the pursuit of pleasure is not pleasing to God. Worldly pleasures endanger, yea, choke man's faith;

they dull the voice of conscience, they quench the Spirit, they create a disastrous indifference, and thus prevent the seed from bearing fruit. Such a man is a fruitless stalk, which at harvest time the angels shall gather, bind into a bundle, and cast into hell.

4.

We have heard of three kinds of people that hear the Gospel of Christ without the proper result, unto their own destruction. There yet remains a fourth class, *the seed on good ground*, which ripens into golden sheaves. Christ mentions these v. 8. And He explains: v. 15. These are said to understand the Word, they see its meaning, comprehend how it applies to them. God's Spirit reveals that which they understood not before; He unlocks truths, opens their eyes, so that they see the beauties of the heavenly Word; they find what they never imagined, and the Spirit fills their heart with unspeakable joy.

They keep this Word. It is laid away in their hearts. It is not stolen by the birds of the air. It does not perish for want of root, nor do ugly thorns choke it. No, they say with David: Ps. 119, 11. 93. The Spirit of God fills their heart, protecting and preserving the living seed in it, so that the enemy may not destroy it. Oh, heavenly state for man to be in! His heart is called honest and good, nice and beautiful, kept thus by angels so that defilement and sin may not soil it.

Seed in such a heart grows, becomes manifest in works. As the tree is known by the fruit it bears, so is man's faith seen in his works; they tell what he is. The seed on good ground bringeth forth fruit with patience and perseverance. What are such fruits? Love towards all men, even enemies; charity, not for a select number, but where needed; heavenly joy that the worldly-minded knows nothing of; longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness; want of pride, for pride is foolishness; temperance, humility, absence of envy and malice. Or as Paul enumerates them elsewhere: Tit. 2, 12. And as they go along, those fruits ripen into perfection, arrive at a state of maturity. Generally not seen, unnoticed by the world, despised and neglected, the nicest flowers bloom in obscurity, hidden from the sight of man. But on the day of Judgment all the hidden thoughts and deeds of men will be made manifest; then will be seen the golden sheaves, the precious fruits meet for the heavenly garner. Overlooked and underrated on earth, now honored and praised; once humbled, pressed into the dust, now raised and glorified. Oh, what a spectacle will that be, to see men that have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not only once, not only ten times, but hundreds of times, to see men that have been prominent in churches, yea, in the front ranks, to see men that have occupied pulpits of great congregations, cast out into the quaking darkness of eternal night—they brought forth no fruit; while the blind, the lame, the

deaf, the dumb, the poor, the despised and trampled on by the mighty of this earth are carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom, for they brought forth fruit with patience!

The Lord points a lesson at the conclusion of this parable, saying: "Take heed therefore how ye hear!" This is no trifling matter. We may forget sermons, but *God* will not. If He will call us to account for every idle word which we have uttered, can we suppose that He will require no account of His own holy Word spoken to us? Oh, it is a dangerous thing to trifle with the Gospel! It will be found at last, the savor of life unto life, or the savor of death unto death. It will either save you or damn you, in the end. If it falls by the wayside, or upon a rock, or among thorns, it is in vain; for in the one case, the devil steals it from your heart, in the other, temptation kills it, while in the third, the cares and riches and pleasures of this life choke it, rendering you unprofitable, without life, strength, and fruit, a dried and dead stalk in the heavenly Father's field. Hence, strive to receive the Word, keep it in an honest and good heart, and let it manifest itself in a sober, righteous, and godly conduct. Practice what you are taught; let your life be a constant confession of your faith. Thus you will bring forth fruit with patience. I close with the words with which our Lord Himself closed the parable: "And when He had said these things, He cried," probably with a louder voice than before, and may the cry reach our souls: "He that hath ears to hear let him hear!" Amen.

F. W. ADAMS, *contr.* by O. K.

Outlines for Lenten Sermons.

1.

MATT. 26, 1—13.

Our Lenten meditations are occupied with what is known as "the Great Passion" of our Lord, His extreme suffering which began in Gethsemane and ended on the cross. Outside of this, there are numerous indications of suffering throughout the life of our Lord on earth. His circumcision on the eighth day, His flight into Egypt, His temptation in the desert, His weary journeys, His poverty, His frequent rejection by the people whom He had come to deliver, all these painful occurrences make His pathway through life a very thorny road, and render Him, from earliest infancy, "the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

However, it is in keeping with Scripture, if we divide from the entire life-story of Jesus the last chapters, in which His suffering reaches an uncommon degree of intensity. Jesus Himself has pointed to the sad events which were crowded into the last week of His life

among men as His "suffering," both before (Matt. 16, 21 ff.; 17, 9, 22 f.; 20, 17—19, 28) and after (Luke 24, 26) His resurrection. Many details of His great passion had been foretold by the prophets, and the evangelists in their account of this part of the life of our Lord again and again point out that this or that was done that the fulfillment of some ancient prophecy might take place. Not only the justice but also the truth and faithfulness of God required that Christ should suffer these bitter things.

In the passage before us there are three distinct characters, all bent upon the same object: all are getting ready for the great passion. We may say that we are here given a glimpse of

THE PREPARATION FOR THE FINAL SUFFERING OF OUR LORD.

1. *Jesus prepares to endure it*, vv. 1, 2.

a. The opening remarks in our text fix the time of these events for us: we are now on the eve of Good Friday. It is only two days till the Passover of the Jews. Then shall the Son of Man be betrayed to be crucified. Calmly, with perfect composure, the Lord makes this announcement to His disciples. He looks His approaching fate steadily in the eye. He is not overwhelmed with the suddenness of the events which He sees approaching. His weary journey through life is now entering its legitimate goal. In all the happier moments which were allotted to Him during His brief ministration He never for a moment was deceived as to the final outcome. The impending agony brings Him no painful surprises. So far as clear intelligence of the issues before Him can prepare Him for His last suffering, He is ready.

b. The announcement to the disciples is not made in a faltering voice. The Sufferer does not break down while telling His followers once more of His sad fate. No vain regrets, no peevish fretfulness mars the grandeur of this quiet utterance. What His intellect perceives as the consummation of God's eternal decrees of mercy, to that His will bows with perfect obedience. Escape from the approaching calamities had been suggested to Him more than once by His timid disciples, when He was about to set out upon His last journey, but He had put every suggestion aside, Matt. 16, 22, 23; John 11, 7—10. So far as firm resolve and a determined will to endure His suffering can prepare Him for the same, Jesus is ready.

c. Two features of His coming passion Jesus names in particular: His betrayal and His crucifixion. These sufferings are essentially human. God cannot be deceived by a treacherous man. God cannot be put to death. In order to accomplish the task set for Him, viz., that of redeeming His guilty brother man from the torments of eternity, the Redeemer had to make Himself the exact counterpart of His brother. It is necessary in the highest degree that we emphasize the human side in the passion of our Lord, in order to make

sure of the fact that this Sufferer is really and truly our representative, our substitute.—But the superhuman insight into His sufferings which He displays, and the more than human readiness to undergo these sufferings, lift Him, true man though He is at this moment when He utters His prediction, above the sphere of puny, short-sighted, easily terrified humanity. This Sufferer is also the omniscient and almighty God. The union of the two natures which has upborne Him hitherto in His merciful mission to man, remains unbroken now that the crisis has been reached. This suffering man is supported in His pains by the mighty God. And it is necessary also that the divine side of the suffering of Jesus be made very prominent to us; that we obtain distinct perceptions of that heavenly virtue which inheres in the agony of the Son of Man, and renders it precious in the sight of God and sufficient for the universal atonement.

2. *His enemies prepare to inflict it*, vv. 3—5.

a. Our text now takes us into a different locality. About the time that Jesus informed His disciples of His suffering, an important meeting of the high-court of the Jewish Church was convened at the palace of the high-priest. All the ranks and orders which had a right to sit in this body were represented. It was a most august gathering of men who were entrusted with the spiritual affairs of God's chosen people. Before this body Christ was arraigned later on the charge of blasphemy. His person and His mission on earth were made the subject of inquiry by these men, and Christ rendered His testimony to this body. But Christ charged these men with sinister motives when He submitted to their examination, Luke 22, 53.

b. It is a study worth our while to observe how these men get ready for our Lord's passion. The opinion of a judge must never be swayed by a regard for popular sentiment. He must study the exact character of the offense and render his verdict in accordance with his finding, without the fear or favor of men. This Jewish high-court studies carefully the possible effect of an official arraignment of Christ upon the populace, and allows outside opinion to determine its course of action.—A judge must deal with facts, not with assumptions; and the facts must be stated in a straightforward, not in a crooked manner. This Hebrew tribunal makes "subtily," craft and cunning, its course of action.—A judge must never pre-judge a client's case. He is the judge of the defendant as well as of the prosecution. If he decides beforehand that the defendant is to be punished, his trial is a hypocritical farce. These judges at Jerusalem start their procedure with a decree to kill Jesus. With this end in view they capture and try Him.—Thus these men get ready for the suffering of the Lord.

3. *His friends prepare to honor it*, vv. 6—13.

a. Once more the scene changes, and we are transferred to a circle of our Lord's intimate friends. Simon, once a leper, now cured

and able to receive guests at his home, prepares a banquet for our Lord and His company. Lazarus, too, newly returned from his tomb, was there, and his sisters, John 12, 1 ff. Often the Lord had recently spoken of His removal; these people now put the few days still remaining of the Lord's earthly sojourn to the best use. His dire predictions only increase the fervor of their affections for Him. Ere death shall close His lips, they wish to hear from Him once more the message He had so often delivered to them. Yea, their Friend becomes dearer to them in view of His impending departure. They prepare for the sad event by making their union with Him stronger.

b. The action of Mary, when taken in connection with the Lord's comment, emphasizes the fact that most persons in this company were conscious of what awaited their Master. The criticism of Judas, John 12, 4, who had not understood Mary's motive, and the inclination of the disciples to side with Judas, whose motive they did not perceive, is squelched by the Lord's: "Let her alone!" "Why trouble ye the woman?" "Against the day of my burying hath she kept this." And He pronounces Mary's deed "a good work." "I can hardly think that our Lord would have said this, unless there had been in Mary's mind a distinct reference to His burial, in doing the act. All the company surely knew well that His death, and that by crucifixion, was near at hand: can we suppose one who so closely observed His words as Mary not to have been possessed with the thought of that which was about to happen? The remark in Mark 14, 8 and John 12, 7 point even more strongly to *her intention*." (Alford.) — Yes, the friends of Jesus, those who have truly known Him and the cause and object of His suffering, hallow the great passion of the Lord by gathering about Him. They institute special devotions at which Christ, though unseen, is still present by the preaching of His cross. And they honor the suffering of Jesus by singing praises on account of it, by studying the wonderful counsel of God for their salvation, and in honor, too, of their heavenly Friend they sacrifice their earthly possessions in the service of Him who loved them and gave Himself for them. He has cleansed them from the leprosy of sin; He has brought them out of their spiritual graves; He has taught them what is the one thing needful. Why should they not love and serve this good Master who loved them first?

[NB. The remaining texts in this series are: Matt. 26, 14—16. 21—25. 47—50, The Betrayal of Judas; Matt. 26, 17—20. 26—29, The Old and the New Passover; Matt. 26, 30—35, The Journey to Gethsemane; Matt. 26, 69—75, Peter's Repentance; Matt. 27, 3—10, Judas's Repentance; Matt. 27, 57—66, The Burial of Jesus (Good Friday).]